

Sibling Rivalry: the India-Australia Relationship, 1858-1901

By Alexander E. Davis (BA Hons)

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Abstract

This thesis examines the relationship between India and Australia between 1858 and 1901. It draws upon a recent reinterpretation of India's role in the British empire that views it as a power centre. This approach is applied to an examination of the India-Australia relationship to consider how the Indian government and the Australian colonial governments communicated with and acted towards one another. This adds to our understanding of the workings of the British empire, India's role within it and shows Australia's imperial connections to be more complicated than a simple connection with London. Starting with the Indian Rebellion and the transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown and ending with Australia's partial break with empire, Federation in 1901, this study will discuss a period in which the relationship has received only very limited attention. India's role in the empire was expanding and the administration in both colonies was stable. Material from around Australia is used, including parliamentary papers from New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, South Australia and Victoria, and archival material from South Australia and Tasmania.

Four chapters focus on separate thematic issues that defined the India-Australia relationship: administrative cooperation, trade, military issues and Indian indentured labour. Previously unknown and unexamined ways in which India and Australia cooperated will be examined. We can conclude from the discussion of administrative cooperation that the relationship between India and Australia was deeper than has previously been acknowledged. The following three chapters continue with this argument, and reveal more details and nuances in the nature of the relationship. The manner of the relationship was extremely friendly – with symbolic gestures on both sides and extremely respectful dialogue. However, it also shows the relationship, as is implied by the conception of India as a major power centre, to be asymmetrical. When it was in her own best interests, India was willing and able to exert its will over Australia. The responses of the Australian colonies to India's ascendancy varied over time and between colonies.

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The National Library of Australia, Canberra

The National Archives of Australia, Canberra

The State Archives of South Australia

The State Library of South Australia

The British Library (particularly the India Office Records)

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List of Abbreviations:

CSO: Colonial / Chief Secretary's Office

ICS: Indian Civil Service

IOR: India Office Records

MIL: Military Department of the Government of India (footnotes only)

NAI: National Archives of India

NLA: National Library of Australia

PD: Premier's Department

PJ: Public and Judicial Department of the Government of India (footnotes only)

SRSA: State Records of South Australia

TAHO: Tasmanian Archives and Heritage Office